DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 209 669 CS 206 630

AUTHOR Stamm, Keith R.; Fortini-Campbell, Lisa
TITLE Community Ties and Newspaper Use. ANPA News Research Report No. 33.
INSTITUTION American Newspaper Publishers Association, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 30 Oct 81
NOTE 9p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Involvement; *Media Research; *Newspapers; News Reporting
IDENTIFIERS *Media Role; *Media Use

ABSTRACT

Going beyond the loosely defined but evocative ideas of previous research linking newspaper readership with ties to the local community, the two studies described in this report carefully distinguish between readers' sense of identification and their actual involvement in the community. The first study discussed in the report examines the impact of community involvement on newspaper use, explicating five components of community involvement: awareness, cognitive orientation, relating, correcting, and working for change. The second study detailed examines the relationship of newspaper use and community identification. The findings presented in the report reveal that both involvement and identification with the local residential community as a geographic place are more strongly related to newspaper use than are involvement and identification with any communities defined in terms of either formal or informal social groups. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

American Newspaper Publishers Association

ANPA NEWS RESEARCH REPORT

FROM THE ANPA NEWS RESEARCH CENTER No. 33 Oct. 30, 1981

A REPORT FOR EDITORS PROVIDED IN COORDINATION WITH THE NEWSPAPER READERSHIP COUNCIL

ED209669

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

American Newspaper Publishers Assoc.

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ROUTE TO:
Editorial _____
Promotion _____
Circulation _____
Advertising _____
Production _____
Personnel _____
Other _____

Community Ties and Newspaper Use

By Keith R. Stamm and Lisa Fortini-Campbell

HIGHLIGHTS: Going beyond the loosely defined, but evocative, ideas of previous research linking newspaper readership with ties to the local community, this two-part report carefully distinguishes between readers' sense of identification and actual involvement with the local community. This Greater Seattle study also explicates five aspects of community involvement, ranging from simple awareness of what is happening to efforts at bringing about change. Overall, the strongest links with the various measures of newspaper use are with the simplest aspect of community involvement, keeping up with what is happening. Both total involvement and each aspect of involvement have especially strong links with subscribing to newspapers. Interestingly, both involvement and identification with the local residential community as a geographic place are more strongly related to newspaper use than are involvement and identification with any communities defined in terms of either formal or informal social groups. The heaviest newspaper users are persons who both identify and are highly involved with their place of residence.

Copyright © 1981 American Newspaper Publishers Association

CS206630

American Newspaper Publishers Association
The Newspaper Center, Box 17407, Dulles International Airport, Washington, D.C. 20041
Katharine Graham, Chairman and President Jerry W. Friedheim, General Manager
Maxwell E. McCombs, Director, ANPA News Research Center

Rewards of Research

Editor's Note: In an interview a good question opens the door to new information—and to many new questions. It is the same in scientific research! In "Science and Common Science," James Conant emphasizes the cumulative, on-going character of the best research in which one study builds upon another to produce richer and more detailed insights. But since readership research is of recent vintage, there are few good examples of this scientific tradition. However, the two studies reported in this ANPA Research Report do represent this tradition in which new work begins to make explicit what was left implicit in previous research. Going beyond the scattered findings of strong links between daily newspaper reading and home ownership, voting, church attendance and other indicators interpretable as outcroppings of community involvement and identification, these new studies carefully distinguish and measure these two concepts and begin the task of explicating their functional relationship to newspaper use. It is the opening gambit in a promising line of research.

Impact of Community Involvement on Newspaper Use

By Lisa Fortini-Campbell and Keith R. Stamm

Fortini-Campbell is a doctoral student in communications and Stamm is an associate professor of communications and director of the Communication Research Center at the University of Washington. The authors appreciate the contributions of Professor Richard Carter, University of Washington, to the refinement of concepts used in this study. This research was supported by a grant from the ANPA News Research Center.

Editors long have emphasized local news, assuming that the loyalty of local readers is in large part maintained through news coverage of the local community. Indeed, the success of many suburban newspapers often has been attributed to their ability to cover "local news" more effectively than competing metropolitan papers.

If local news is what attracts readers to the newspaper, then we would expect to find among newspaper readers those who are the most involved in the local community. Involvement in the local community should be a useful predictor of newspaper subscriptions and readership.

The proposition that community involvement is positively related to newspaper use has been tested by other researchers, and usually supported by the evidence. (See, for example, ANPA News Research Reports Nos. 17 and 18.) This study extends that previous work by giving more precise meaning to what is meant by a *local community* and to what is meant by *involvement.*

Involvement in a community has been loosely defined in previous research. Sometimes it has meant membership, other times attendance or participation, or even informal contact with friends and neighbors. While these are no doubt useful indicators of involvement, they don't tell us much about what involvement really is. Consequently, they can't explain how we can say that one person is more "deeply involved" in the community than another.

This research has explicated five components of involvement. Beginning with the lowest degree of involvement, these are:

- Attending
- Orienting
- Agreeing
- Connecting
- Manipulating

At the very least, involvement includes an *awareness* of the community. An individual attends to his or her community, keeping up with its activities and changes.

Second, involvement is a *cognitive orientation* to the community. The individual has ideas about how the parts of the community are related, where the community has been and where it is going.

Third, individuals can *relate* themselves to the community because they have the same concerns as others or agree with their views.

A fourth aspect of involvement is *connecting.* The individual connects with other community members by talking to them, listening to them, or getting together in some fashion.

Finally, the fifth dimension of involvement is present when an individual *works for change* in the community. He or she may attempt to reorganize its structure or redirect its path.

Thus, involvement contains several dimensions, or aspects, each of which may be present to varying degrees. The five concepts used here reflect the nature of *involvement* in both residential communities and social groups.

The second article in this report treats newspaper use as an antecedent of community identification. Here the focus regards *involvement as an antecedent of newspaper use,* a focus taken by many past researchers. In addition, this view enables newspapers to locate po-

tential readers in order to increase readership, and to make themselves more relevant to those already involved in their communities.

Methodology

Following a series of detailed, face-to-face interviews on community involvement and identification, a questionnaire was designed for telephone interviews to probe individuals' community identification, involvement and newspaper use. The questionnaire was pretested and revised three times.

Five items were used to tap the respondent's notion of his involvement in the communities he names. The same set was used for both the residential and social group communities. Each item was designed to reflect one of the dimensions of involvement: attending, orienting, agreeing, connecting and manipulating. These items in the questionnaire asked:

How often do you . . . . . .

keep up with what's happening in (respondent's community,?

have ideas for improving this community?

have the same concerns as other people in _____?

get together with other people in this community?

work to bring about changes in _____?

The questionnaire was administered to a proportionate random sample of 800 telephone subscribers in the Greater Seattle area during early June, 1979. The last four digits for each phone number were generated randomly. Initially, 1,191 phone contacts were made. Of those 391 resulted in refusals. The final sample was 800, a completion rate of 67 percent.

Findings

Are individuals more involved in their residential community or in the social groups to which they belong? To answer this question, Table 1 compares average levels of involvement in different types of communities.

At first glance, the findings suggest that persons were more involved in social group communities (in particular, informal groups) than they were in their residential communities. However, these scores must be interpreted in light of a few other facts. First, 87 percent of the respondents identified themselves with their social groups communities, whereas only 73 percent identified themselves with their residential community. But, it is significant that only 69 percent of the respondents named a group as important to their lives, whereas everyone named a place community.

With these preliminary results in mind, we can proceed to an examination of the relationships between involvement and newspaper subscriptions, newspaper readership and demographic variables. The strongest correlates in Table 2 of total involvement in the residential community are number of newspaper subscriptions, home ownership and recent voting behavior. All of these relationships are positive, indicating that when the respondent is highly involved he or she also is likely to subscribe to several newspapers, own a home and to have voted recently. To a lesser extent, length of subscription and time spent reading the newspaper were correlated with residential community involvement.

The relationship between each dimension of involvement and these variables also was examined.

Table 1

Average Levels of Community Involvement

	Type of Community		
Involvement	**Residential**	**Formal Group**	**Informal Group**
Keep Up	2.5	3.2	3.2
Have Ideas	2.2	2.7	2.8
Same Concerns	2.8	3.2	3.3
Get Together	2.4	2.6	2.8
Work for Change	2.2	2.5	2.6
Total Involvement	12.1	14.2	14.6
	N=796	N=301	N=233

Individual involvement items range from 1 (low) to 4 (high). Total involvement is a summed index ranging from 4 to 20. Missing data for individual items replaced with the mean for that time.

Once again, the strong correlates in Table 2 of the individual dimensions of involvement tend to be the number of newspaper subscriptions, home ownership and recent voting behavior.

A few additional findings are of special note. Keeping up with the community correlates positively with every variable except length of subscription. It is interesting that this simplest form of involvement—an interest in keeping up with what's happening in the local community—is the best single predictor. Other findings in Table 2 indicate that the longer an individual lived in the community, the more he believed that he shared the concerns of others. Those willing to work

Table 2

Correlation of Involvement in Residential Community with Other Variables

Involvement	Number of Subscriptions	Subscription Length	Time Read	Story Recall	Years Residency	Age	Home Ownership	Recent Vote
Keep Up	.33	-.11	.13	.05	.10	.05	.19	.29
Have Ideas	.16	.00	.06	.05	.05	.01	.11	.17
Same Concerns	.23	-.04	.07	.07	.11	.04	.19	.22
Get Together	.18	-.04	.05	.04	.04	.01	.13	.21
Work for Change	.17	-.03	.15	.10	.06	.10	.12	.23
Total Involvement	.27	-.11	.10	.09	.07	.04	.23	.34

Underlined correlations are statistically significant ($p < .05$).

for change in the community not only subscribed to several newspapers, but they spent more time reading and were more able to recall what they had read. They also tended to be older individuals (30-64 years of age) who owned their homes and had voted recently.

It is possible, of course, that newspaper use and involvement in the residential community are correlated only because they are both related to the same antecedent conditions. Therefore, a more detailed analysis was conducted.

This analysis found that the correlations between newspaper use and community involvement hold steady even when controlled for the effects of length of residence, age and home ownership. The relationship between involvement and length of subscription did virtually disappear when voting behavior was held constant. However, this finding is reasonable because involvement is so highly correlated with voting behavior. Overall, we can conclude that the relationship between involvement and newspaper use is not spurious.

Other Analysis

When we examined the group communities (both formal organizations and informal groups) we found very few significant relationships between involvement and newspaper use. The best correlate of involvement in group communities was the number of newspaper subscriptions (+.12).

To examine this relationship further, we broke down the groups according to type. Even this detailed analysis revealed little relationship between involvement in various types of groups and measures of newspaper use. Involvement in both formal organizations and service groups again was positively related to number of subscriptions, but the correlation was weak. In most cases, demographic variables were stronger correlates of group involvement than the newspaper variables. For example, involvement in political groups was correlated with home ownership, age and recent voting. It was also correlated with length of subscription, but not with number of newspapers read, time spent reading or number of stories recalled.

Involvement and Identification

Finally, we asked whether involvement in combination with community identification—the topic of the second part of this ANPA News Research Report—would provide an even stronger prediction of newspaper use.

Our first step was to look at the overlap between identification and involvement. We found a strong, positive relationship in which the incidence of identification increased with the degree of involvement (Table 3). Thus, high involvement most often occurred in conjunction with identification. Identification without high involvement occurred more often than high involvement without identification.

Turning to the joint effect of identification and involvement, we found some evidence of an additive effect on newspaper use. In fact, persons who were both identified with and highly involved in the residential community were the most likely to subscribe to several newspapers, and to have done so for 10 years or more. They were also the most likely to spend more than half an hour with their newspapers. These persons generally had lived in the community 10 years or more, were between 30 and 64 years of age, owned their home and had voted recently. Persons who were neither identified nor involved had the opposite profile.

Table 3

Identification by Involvement in Residential Community

	Involvement:				
Identification	**Low**	**Medium-Low**	**Medium-High**	**High**	
Inside	45%	74%	88%	91%	N=561
Outside	55%	26%	12%	9%	N=205
N =	211	205	119	231	766

$X^2 = 136.17$, 3 df, $p < .001$

Conclusions

Our findings relating involvement with place of residence to newspaper use and a variety of demographic factors have some useful implications for newspapers.

The relationship observed between community involvement and newspaper use is consistent with the idea that community orientation is an important motive behind newspaper subscription and readership. It is especially useful to discover that the simplest form of involvement, an interest in keeping up with what's happening, is a key aspect of this involvement.

At the same time, this community involvement has been linked closely with more visible demographic variables—particularly home ownership and voting. These variables can serve as locators of involved individuals, and thereby can be used to identify the most promising new subscribers and readers.

These variables also outline the subject matter most likely to interest readers.

Some questions also have been raised that call for additional research on community involvement. Why wasn't involvement with social groups linked to newspaper use? Is news coverage of social communities inadequate to serve the needs of readers who are involved in groups? Would improved coverage of these social communities offer a way of reaching additional readers and subscribers?

Creative editors and reporters can translate these general results into specific stories which will attract and maintain regular readership. ■

Newspaper Use and Community Identification

By Keith R. Stamm and Lisa Fortini-Campbell

Do newspapers help people become identified with the community? The importance of such a function should not be underestimated in a society as mobile as ours. According to many observers, the individual in a mobile society suffers from identity problems.

This study extends and refines previous work on the relationship of newspapers to community identification (ANPA News Research Reports Nos. 14, 17, 18, 20). More exact definitions of community identification have been developed. Three different types of communities (to be identified with) have been distinguished:

- Communities as places
- As informal social groups
- As formal organizations

Also, *identification* has been kept separate from community *involvement*, which is discussed in the companion to this article.

These efforts to achieve sharper definitions have made it possible to sort out some new research questions. First, is newspaper use related to identification with all communities, or only to identification with particular types? We already have seen in the first part of this report that newspaper use is related only to involvement with residential communities.

It also bears asking whether any type of newspaper, and any kind of use is related to community identification. For example, do metropolitan dailies, suburban dailies and community weeklies all contribute equally? Is it enough to subscribe to a newspaper, or does one have to read particular content for a certain amount of time?

Methodology

The data for this study were gathered in the same Greater Seattle survey described in the first part of this report. The questionnaire included items which tapped each respondent's identification with the locale in which he or she was living, and with a group of the respondent's choice (e.g., formal organization, social group, interest group).

To obtain a measure of identification with his place of residence, the respondent was first asked to imagine the community as a circle, then to indicate whether he would place himself inside or outside the circle. If the respondent placed himself inside, closeness of identification was also measured by having the respondent indicate whether he would locate himself "very close," "close" or "not very close" to the center of the circle.

Table 1

Percentage Identifying with Each Type of Residential Community

Identification	Total	Seattle	City Neighborhood	Suburb
% Inside	73.1	87.9	73.6	71.7
% Outside	26.9	12.1	26.4	28.3
(Total N)	(799)	(34)	(392)	(272)

Percentage Identifying with Each Type of Social Community

Identification	Total[1]	Social[2]	Service	Business	Political	Education	Religion	Advocacy
% Inside	86.0	88.7	82.9	84.6	81.0	88.0	93.6	85.5
% Outside	14.0	11.3	17.1	15.4	19.0	12.0	6.4	14.5
(Total N)	(540)	(100)	(111)	(79)	(42)	(25)	(128)	(55)

[1]Includes only those respondents who named a group important to their lives.
[2]Includes only those respondents who identified with a social community (group or organization).

Table 2

Correlation of Identification with Newspaper Use and Other Variables[1]

Identification with:	Number of Newspapers	Subscription Length	Time Read	Story Recall	Years Residency	Age	Buy/Rent	Recent Vote	Total[4]
Place of Residence	.14	.09	.12	.07	.13	.09	.20	.18	648/766
Service Groups[2]	.06	.10	.07	.22	.14	.08	.16	.05	111/111
Informal Groups[3]	.05	.10	.15	.20	.06	.04	.04	.13	201/234

[1]Values in the table are non-parametric correlation coefficients indicating the direction and strength of relationship.
[2]This row includes only persons who mentioned a service organization as being an important group in their life.
[3]This row includes only persons who mentioned informal groups as important to their life, e.g., work, friends, neighbors.
[4]Cell N's vary because certain newspaper and/or identification measures could not appropriately be made for all 800 cases. The first value in each row is the lowest sample size for that row; the second value is the highest.

Underlined correlations are statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Findings

The great majority of respondents felt they were "inside" the community they designated as their place of residence. Most respondents named a city neighborhood or a suburb as their place of residence, not the city of Seattle, although those who named the city were just as likely as suburbanites to experience place identification (Table 1).

Among those to whom social communities (i.e., groups and organizations) were important, a substantial majority again felt they were "insiders" (Table 1). A number of different kinds of social communities were named, but the findings show very little difference in identification according to the kind of community. The possible exception was that religious groups had a somewhat higher proportion of insiders.

We now come to the central purpose of the study—examining the relationship between community identification and use of newspapers. Table 2 shows that measures of newspaper use were consistently correlated with place identification, supporting the idea that newspapers play a role in the formation of community identification.

Our next step was to analyze formal and informal social communities separately. This yielded some significant correlations in Table 2 for informal groups, but none for formal groups (i.e., organizations).

These findings indicate that the relationship of newspaper use to community identification cannot be generalized over all types and varieties of social communities. Newspapers play a role in identification with a few of these social communities, but not in most.

Because of the promising findings obtained for identification with place and newspaper use, detailed breakdowns are presented to describe these relationships more clearly.

First, Table 3 elaborates on the finding that the percentage of persons identified with their place of residence was greater among newspaper subscribers. This relationship held regardless of the type of newspaper subscribed to.

The percentage of persons identifying with a residential community also increased with the length of newspaper subscription, up to six years of subscribing.

Beyond six years of subscription there was no additional increase in the incidence of place identification.

The incidence of place identification also increased with the amount of time spent reading, but only up to a point. This relationship leveled off at 11-29 minutes of reading. Although most respondents reported spending more time than this with the paper, this additional reading time was unrelated to community identification.

Lastly, place identification was more prevalent among those who could recall one or more stories they had read recently. Again, the recall of additional stories (more than one) was not related to place identification, and it made no difference whether the story recalled was local or non-local. This finding appears to show simply that those people who had read the paper carefully enough to recall something were also more likely to identify with the community.

Table 3

Percent Identified with Place of Residence by Indicators of Newspaper Use

SUBSCRIPTIONS:	**None**	**National[1]**	**Metro[2]**	**Suburban[3]**	**Weekly[4]**	**Total[5]**
Percent Identified	66.5%	95.8	75.9*	72.0	88.9	945
YEARS SUBSCRIBED:	**1 or less**	**2-5**	**6 or more**			
Percent Identified	64.0%	70.9	80.3			616
DAILY READING TIME:	**10 minutes or less**	**11-29 minutes**	**30-55 minutes**	**Over 55 minutes**		
Percent Identified	64.3%	80.3	74.5	74.2		766
NO STORIES RECALLED:[6]	**None**	**1 or more local**	**1 or more non-local**			
Percent Identified	65.0%	75.0	77.2			703

[1]National daily newspaper from outside Seattle area—e.g., The Wall Street Journal.
[2]Either of the two metropolitan dailies—The Seattle Times or the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.
[3]A suburban daily within the Seattle SMSA.
[4]A weekly newspaper serving a Seattle neighborhood.
[5]Sample size was 800, but row totals vary. Row 1 exceeds 800 due to multiple subscriptions. Row 2 excludes non-subscribers; row 3 excludes those who had not read a newspaper recently; and row 4 includes only those who had read a newspaper "today" or "yesterday."
[6]Based on recall of stories only for those who had read a newspaper "today" or "yesterday."

*Indicates a statistically significant relationship by chi-square test.

Our findings so far have described a consistent pattern of relationships between newspaper use and place identification. However, we must still ask whether these relationships could be spurious. There are a number of "third variables" correlated with both newspaper use and place identification that offer alternative explanations of the relationships observed. Previous research has amply documented the positive relationships of each of these (age, home ownership, length of residence) to newspaper use. However, further examination of the data produced strong evidence that the initial findings here were not due to spurious relationships. The relationship between community identification and newspaper use appears to be a very real one.

While the direction of effect is not established by this research—we do not know which causes the other—nevertheless, the existence of this relationship emphasizes the importance of the daily newspaper's place in the local *residential* community.

The most striking outcome of this research is that newspaper use is linked with identification and involvement with the local residential community, but not with the social communities within these geographic places.

These findings undermine those critics who contend that newspapers devote too much coverage to local political affairs. Rather they suggest leads for sharpening the focus of this coverage so that it better spells out the implications of these events for local readers' psychological identification and involvement with their residential community.

The weak link with newspaper use of social group identification and involvement points out the need for innovation in the news coverage of local groups. Establishing a stronger functional link between news and readers' involvement and identification with local groups is one avenue to increased readership. ■